

Débutante

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Débutante

by [Melancholiclullaby](#)

Summary

Every year, Baltimore hosts the nationally acclaimed *Savoureux-Rosé Ball*, a debutante ball that formally presents young aristocratic omegas to high society once they have reached marriageable age in the hopes of securing their futures with Alphas of prestigious status and wealth. An event of important historical significance, the ball precedes a number of social gatherings meant to formally introduce the youth to Baltimore's most eligible of bachelors and is commonly considered the single most important day in an omega's life, second only to their wedding day.

Through a series of coincidences and fated meetings, scruffy, low-bred Will Graham finds himself the only male omega reluctantly presenting at the ball this year, in order to fulfill a promise he'd made to his dying father. Will's beauty and biting, neurotic nature manages to catch the eye of a Dr. Hannibal Lecter, a cultured Alpha psychiatrist with an outwardly genteel manner and a violence lurking behind his eyes that only Will can see.

A Feast for Vultures

Chapter Notes

My note got a little long-winded, so please [Click Here](#) to read it on a google doc! It contains a bit of insight for the type of world setting I'm going for and what to expect from me.

Will Graham flinched when a set of spotlights swung his way, blinding him momentarily through a thin crack in the burgundy curtains which separate him from the rest of the crowd. Specifically, it separates him from the capricious gaze of *polite society*. The thought sends blood rushing in his ears, muted only by the steady *thrum thrum thrum* of his heartbeat. He could feel it rattling against his chest like a caged animal, wild and desperate for release. The glare made his vision blur around the edges and lends his surroundings a surreal, dreamlike quality that should have been more comforting than ominous, but isn't.

When had he become such a drama queen? Will frowned, bringing up a hand to pinch the bridge of his nose wearily.

A swell of voices drifts up to him from beyond the curtain, firmly planting him back in the present to remind him none-to-gently of where he is. If memory serves, he was currently standing beneath the roof of the *Le Pavillon* hotel, waiting to be..debuted. Presented. Displayed like a well-dressed entrée to a ravenous host, he thinks with more than a little bitterness. This is a gathering not for him, but for Baltimore's most elite: all silk-gloved fingers and perfectly tailored coattails. In Will's head, they wore satin gowns and sharpened suits, vultures heads in place of human skulls, wearing necklaces of pearl and bone. It made him feel a little bit nauseous.

Someone reached out to fix the curtain, and Will finds himself thankful for the intervention. There is something comforting about being swallowed up in darkness, and if he were alone, he might have been able to imagine himself cocooned by it. He is reminded of how very much not-alone he is when a murmur sweeps through the airy room, followed quickly by girlish giggling. Will, deciding it high time to ground himself in reality once more, chances a glance to his right. If it weren't for the lack of lights, he might have been blinded a second time by the sheer sea of *white* that greets him.

Omegan beauties surround him, suffocating him with their perfect poise and enviable grace. Each lithe body – so demure, so delicate – is wrapped artfully in a meticulously chosen designer gown. The silk *Peau-d'Ange* of the blonde girl beside him brushes by his ankle, and to his left Swarovski crystals swim glittering in his vision, embroidered on the bodice of a pale brunette with elegant features. They are all so beautiful, frustratingly so, but no matter how hard they tried to stand apart from each other Will is struck by the sameness of it all. Rows upon rows of the same pretty face and wide guileless eyes, same white dress and ivory

gloves, same slim frames and stylish hair. Will sighs audibly, drawing an odd glance or two to himself. He averts his gaze back down to the floor in the hopes that they'd forget he was even there.

The girls practically trembled with excitement, and Will couldn't bring himself to fault any of them their hope. Unable to turn off his natural empathy, Will can feel the vibrato of their collective heartbeats, could see the color of their hopes and dreams laid out bare before him. They had all dreamed of this night since they were children, and still deeply invested in fairytale romances. They clung to a desperate hope that they would find the man – the *Alpha* – of their dreams someday, and that tonight was the first step to finding a mate they could live happily forever after with. They'd woo him with their pretty smiles and pretty dresses and their distinctly Omegan scents. For a night, they could forget the reality of man; forget the darkness that lurked in the deepest reaches of the human soul. In their blissful ignorance they would eventually be consumed, their innocence turned to ashes. Will envied them that. He'd seen too much of that darkness to ever forget that it was there.

Suddenly, Will becomes hyper-aware of the fact that he is the only male omega presenting that night. He feels entirely uncomfortable in his too-white tux, fidgeting uselessly in place, wishing desperately that he were anywhere but here. What he would give not to have to participate in this outdated, deeply flawed and deeply patriarchal institution. It wasn't like he intended for anything to change, anyway. In due time the night would end, he'd go back to his waiting pack, and everything would go right back to normal. In the grand scheme of things this night would be no more than a minor blip on the radar, easily forgotten. It all seems so unnecessary, but he had a duty to fulfill and would see it through to the end. So then why was he so anxious?

He is only distracted from his nervous fiddling when a new voice pervades the perfume-laden air. It has a distinctly digital, amplified edge to it. The speaker must have finally arrived.

“Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to Baltimore's 150th Annual Savoureux-Rosé Ball, benefiting our very own Center of the Arts. Tonight, we present to you the finest that Baltimore has to offer. Rare young ladies and gentlemen who have bloomed beautifully into adulthood and are ready to present themselves to eligible society as Débutantes. They encapsulate all it means to be truly Omegan: comely, tender, compassionate.....”

“Hey, now. It's not gonna be *that* bad,” a voice whispers beside him. Will's gaze only makes it as far as her shoulder. It's the dark-haired brunette next to him speaking. She must have heard the disgruntled noise he'd made at the back of his throat when he realized how long and tiresome that speech was gonna be.

“You don't know that.”

“They're not going to eat you alive out there you know. Just take a breath and relax, you might actually enjoy yourself.”

Will is surprised to find that there's nothing chiding in her tone, no note of derision that he is so accustomed to hearing when he's addressed. She sounds faintly amused, mostly reserved and a little bit soothing, like she is genuinely trying to help. He doesn't know how to respond to that, so he doesn't.

The speaker's voice continues to drone on in the background. Some time passes before the dark-haired woman speaks again.

“Alana.”

“I – what?”

“My name. It's Alana.”

Will tears his gaze away from a particularly bland spot on the carpet and forces himself to spare her a fleeting glance. He looks at her just long enough to commit her face to memory before he is overwhelmed by what he sees: the ephemeral image of baby blues, long dark lashes and a thin, wry smile that bespoke intelligence beyond her years. This was why he doesn't look at people. It's too much information, too many variables and he's never really sure what to even do with the knowledge. He shuffles awkwardly on his feet and returns his gaze to the floor.

Before he could respond with his own name the massive stage curtains open, bathing them all in a warm gold-white light. When Will's eyes finally adjust to the sudden brightness, he can make out the crystalline structure of a massive, old-world chandelier at the center of the paneled ceiling. An elegant staircase leads down to a massive, french-style ballroom, glittering in hues of red and gold trim. A crowd has gathered at the foot of the stairs, scrutinizing the newly unveiled debutantes like they were a collection of fine *objets d'art* up for auction, humming appreciatively and whispering amongst themselves. They aren't terribly far off the mark.

Not for the first time, Will Graham wonders what the hell he is doing here.

“Promise me, Jack.”

A dull, intermittent beep filled the air already heavy with the sterile smell of antiseptic. It beat in cadence with the rhythmic hiss and whir of a nearby respirator (ventilator; Jack reminded himself dully. That's what they were calling those now.) to lend the hospital room a distinctively bleak atmosphere. The room was dim, lit only by a simple desk lamp at the far corner of the room. The original fluorescent ceiling lights had started to irritate the patient living here, Jack had heard. Something about light sensitivity issues.

“I'm an FBI agent, Ezra. Not a goddamn miracle worker.”

Jack Crawford's voice sounded loud and harsh even to his own ears, blasphemous in its disregard for the sacrosanct quietness of a hospital room. He closed his eyes and took a long, quieting breath, exhaling harshly. He didn't know how else to deal with his anger, his grief. It had always been a shortcoming of his.

The older patient lying prone in the room's singular hospital bed released a low, throaty chuckle, reading the lines of Jack's apology in his bearing. They'd always been able to understand each other like this. It was one of the things that Crawford appreciated most

about his friendship with Ezra. No matter how many months or even years that Jack went without so much as a courtesy call, he could always count on coming back to things being just as they were before.

The laughter didn't last long. It devolved into a short, vicious fit of coughing, and Ezra had to take a moment to catch his breath. A pregnant silence filled the room while the sickly man stared at a blank spot on the opposite wall, eyes drooping with a resigned sort of tiredness.

"You arrest dangerous criminals and save lives. You're the closest thing I got to a miracle."

The line of Jack's mouth hardens and he sets his jaw audibly, visibly chafing underneath the weight of his friend's esteem and expectations. Ezra was finally cashing in on a debt long since unfulfilled. Jack couldn't let him down. He wouldn't be able to forgive himself if he did. He owed him that much. Deep in thought, the detective lets his gaze fall upon an armchair slumped up against the wall on the other side of Ezra's bed.

A young man with wild curly brown hair sleeps on that chair, curled in on himself with a threadbare blanket wrapped tightly around his body to ward off some nonexistent chill. His jaw is covered in scruffy, patchy stubble but it does little to mature him. He groans a little bit in his sleep, and Jack wonders what sorts of things he dreams. He has a feeling it isn't anything good.

Crawford takes an instinctual whiff and catches the clean, ordinary scent of a newly matured Beta. But Jack knows better, now that Ezra's told him the truth. If he scented the air long and hard enough, scrubbed away the synthetic smell of Beta and suppressants he'd unearth the indescribably enticing scent of pure Omega buried underneath the telltale stench of fear and anxiety. As a pair-bonded Alpha, the scent itself would do little to affect him, thankfully. He finds that he knows little about this young man in spite of his years-long relationship with his father. He's only met the boy a handful of times up until this point. Then again, Ezra's always been particularly protective of his son. A small, tightly packed ball of neuroses, that one.

When Jack looks back at Ezra Graham, he sees that he too is watching the boy sleep.

"I got nothin' left," Ezra's voice is deep-chested and gravelly, aged many more years by his illness. "Nothin' to leave behind. No heirlooms, no college savings. It's a wonder he finished his high-school education with all the movin' around we did. He's smart, Jack. Smarter than me, maybe even smarter than you." He chuckled again and Jack couldn't help smiling a little too. The man's mirth – however brief – was contagious. They fell again into a thoughtful silence before Ezra continued. "I just wanna make sure my Will will be able to keep on goin' when I'm gone, ya know? I want a future for him. It grieves me to know that I couldn't give that to him, but maybe you could. A life for a life, eh?" He smiles and Jack remembers all too vividly that day, all those years ago, that Ezra Graham saved his life.

"I can't make any promises, Ezra. But I'll do the best that I can."

Jack Crawford stands on the sidelines, elbow-to-elbow with the other chaperones awaiting the much anticipated appearance of their wards. He's still reminiscing by the time the show

starts, thick wine-colored curtains pulling back to unveil the night's guests of honor to a resounding round of applause. The cacophony of clapping, whistling and approving murmurs helps to relax Jack a bit. Helps ease him into the proper mindset for festivities. He's not sure why he's so worried.

He catches sight of Will Graham among the girls, looking suspect and highly out of place in his rented white tux. While the other girls held on to small bouquets of flowers, Will's hands were empty; instead he wore a boutonniere of Hydrangea pinned to his breastpocket. He'd picked it out himself for the occasion. Not that he had wanted to, really.. the boy would have preferred to do away with all the frock and frill but it had been required of him. Jack was fairly sure that if he had not intervened, Will would have probably tried coming to the Ball in jeans or some shit.

Crawford exhales an agitated breath, remembering the sheer battle of wills that had taken place before the ball. Will had fought tooth and nail not to be here. He had opposed the idea from the very start, claiming that the debutante balls and all they stood for went against everything he believed in. For an Omega, he was surprisingly fierce...and Jack didn't say that as a compliment. It had become very clear very fast that Will had spent much of his life fighting his biological impulses to attain some sense of independence. He was convinced it had something to do with Will being an only child to an absentee mother and a sickly father, as well as being predisposed toward autism. He supposed that given this, it wouldn't be too far-fetched to assume that there was some sort of mental disconnect between Will's mind and his body. If he were being truly honest with himself, he didn't hold out much hope that Will would find a partner willing to put up with him.

In his defense, though, this whole ball thing hadn't exactly Jack's first choice. He was still trying to secure a scholarship for penniless Graham to a post-secondary school (he was hoping to eventually get Will into the police academy, after the young man had expressed interest in the field) but between the stringent screening processes and an antiquated bureaucratic system it was proving to be a long, difficult and possibly fruitless endeavor.

When Jack had learned about the upcoming Ball, he'd come to Ezra and explained that it might be good idea for Will to put himself out there and maybe, just maybe, he'd get lucky and find a mate willing to support him financially. Ezra had been reluctant at first, valuing his son's sense of independence, but was so desperate for stability in Will's life that he had eventually agreed. It took a fair bit of time but eventually he managed to convince Will to at least *try*, and that was mostly his father's doing. Jack pulled some strings – he had connections – and managed to snag an invitation to one of Baltimore's most exclusive Omega Balls.

“Winona Freeman, daughter of Donald and Connie Freeman,” the speaker calls out from behind her podium, the amplified sound of her voice jerking Crawford back to the present. He must have missed the beginning of the introductions, he'd been so lost in thought. Jack watches as Winona smiles, steps out from the collection of girls and makes her way to the center of the stage at the top of the stairs. She curtsies, her technique perfect, and descends the stairs on the arm of her escort.

That was what Jack was here for. Well, that and moral support, which he doubts that Will appreciates or even cares about. Each debutante was required to be chaperoned by at least one male escort, usually family. Will had resisted this idea as well, but probably more out of embarrassment than anything. But the boy didn't have any other family, and so didn't have much of a choice other than to let Jack barrel his way through and chaperone him anyway.

More names are announced, more girls descend the stairs, and time passes. Finally, Jack hears them call Will's name and meets him at the top of the stairs. He takes his place beside him, his posture ramrod straight.

“Straighten your shoulders,” Jack whispers, voice commanding. “Look alive.”

Will smiles, wide and toothy, but it doesn't quite reach his eyes.

“You gonna kiss me on the cheek, too, Jack? Is it already time to leave me to the Romans?” Will's laugh is quiet and resentful. Jack doesn't respond.

Enter Hannibal

Chapter Notes

oh my gosh don't kill me, I know it's been like half a year since I started this fic oh noo. Please, even if you remember the first chapter, read it again before coming back to this one -- I merged the previous two chapters into one and re-wrote a lot of it. I have a much better understanding of where I want this fic to go, and have started writing an outline for it, so I hope to update at least semi-regularly! (cross your fingers, ahh, I'm still as busy as ever.) Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Please welcome to the stage William Shannon Graham, son of Ezra and Caroline Graham. 18 years of age, originally hailing from the historical bayous of Louisiana. Graham also happens to be our only male presenting tonight.. go easy on him, my friends.”

The lighthearted jab induces airy laughter in the audience, but Will Graham winces at the unnecessary addition to his introduction. He understands, though, that it was meant for his benefit – however misguided. Being the only one of his particular gender available tonight is supposed to make him more appealing and sympathetic.. or..something like that. And it works. The crowd, who otherwise might have largely ignored him, begin to perk up and scrutinize him in earnest. It makes him incredibly uncomfortable, but he doesn't usher a word of complaint.

He brings to mind all of the etiquette classes he'd been forced to endure over the last couple of months, and bows as graciously as he can manage – which is to say, not very graciously at all. But he doesn't somehow screw it up so there's that. His bow is stiff and nervous, but some in the audience apparently find it endearing, considering the chuckles and approving whispers that soon follow. He quickly hooks his arm in Jack's and they descend the staircase in silence.

At the foot of the stairs, the debutantes have organized themselves into a single-file receiving line, their escorts just behind them. Will lets go of Crawford's arm to take his place amongst the girls, and the agent dutifully takes his place behind him in solemn silence. Will imagines that the escorts are there to make sure nothing inappropriate occurs between the Debutantes and the bachelors that will spend the next half hour chatting up each and every one. He snorts derisively at the idea but no one seems to notice.

To no one's surprise, Graham finds the meet-n'-greet lineup insufferable and it's a small mercy when it's over. By the end of it he feels like he's shaken hundreds of hands and exchanged hollow pleasantries with half the city. It isn't just bachelors that come to greet, either; the most established of Baltimore's social circles join them as well as the debutante's families, but he recognizes none of them. He doesn't look anyone in the eye, choosing to focus instead on their chins (he'd rather not have to see the disdain in their eyes, thank you

very much) and most seem to move on from him quickly. A few people stop to chat with him longer, mostly gents and old crones that are probably attracted to him on some physical level. Will's not stupid. He knows he is, generally, considered attractive..maybe even very much so. Especially when he's had a shave for once in his life and taken a brush to his hair. He can't find it in him to feel anything but vaguely repulsed by the notion, though.

One portly gentleman with a reddish, rotund face and thinning brown hair has the gall to touch the inside of Will's wrist – an intimate gesture-- while shaking his hand. Jack doesn't notice. Will says something short and the man puffs up like a fish, moving on quickly to the next in line. At least they're easy to get rid of, he thinks dryly. Eventually the line peters out and breaks entirely, the debutantes and the rest of the attendees free to move and mingle to the sound of elegant jazz and string quartets.

He has to hand it to them. The Chairmen of the Omegan Debutante Committee know how and where to throw a party. The ballroom is absolutely massive, it's paneled high ceilings decorated with hand-painted frescoes and ornate mouldings. Marble pillars, lacquered in criss-crossing patterns of red and gold, bear the weight of the ceiling on either side of the room. The walls are likewise decorated with the same type of mouldings and are broken up by towering church-like windows. When the glare of the ballroom lights are unobtrusive, Will can see pinpricks of starlight shine through the glass. There's a grand Italian marble fireplace at the far end of the room, and most of the walls are adorned with either elaborate antique mirrors or portraits in the Baroque style to match the architecture.

Will didn't expect there to be so many people. He feels almost claustrophobic here, rubbing elbows with oil tycoons here and the daughters of senators there. Beneath the sound of music is the dull roar of chatter and laughter freely given. While everyone still holds themselves with propriety and grace, the atmosphere is now casual, and most have broken off to converse in groups of three or four. The room practically glitters, a sea of tiaras and diamond rings shining beautifully underneath the light of the great big crystal chandelier, the ballroom's great showstopper. Will never thought he'd ever be witness to such superfluous extravagance, but life had a funny way of working, didn't it. He thought about his house in Wolf Trap and the way it too glittered at night from afar, looking not unlike a boat gently wading through the fog. The imagery helps put him at ease, if only a little bit.

He is jerked from his reverie by Jack, whose phone rings loudly and rudely. The agent takes the call, excusing himself hastily before disappearing into the crowd. Will had been planning on planting his feet right there and staying by his guardian's side in the hopes that the man's perpetual glower would scare off anyone interested in approaching him, but it seems that it is not meant to be. He frowns, and a man with a red-white uniform and perfect posture walks by with a tray full of champagne. Will snatches a flute without so much as a curt 'thank you'. He downs the booze, wipes his mouth, and goes in search of a quiet spot to brood.

...

"Most psychology departments are filled with personality deficient. Miss Bloom here will prove to be the exception."

The voice of the speaker is a smooth baritone with a quaint European accent that is evocative of old world charm. He's a tall man with notably broad shoulders, long wiry limbs and wind-

chafed skin. One hand gently cradles a champagne flute while the other rests at the small of his back, investing the entirety of his attention to the subject of his praise without losing a sliver of his regal bearing. His hair is sleek, an aged brown-gold parted to the left without a single strand out of place. He is an older gentleman whose every deliberate movement drips of intelligence, affluence and cultured sensibilities.

Alana beams modestly, and an appreciative murmur sweeps through the little social circle that has gathered around her. She is one of this year's favorites with her bright eyes, quick wit and unparalleled scholarly pursuits. She had just been in deep conversation with Mrs. Emelia Hamilton and Edward Sheraton -- a renowned physicist -- about her future plans to pursue a degree in psychology when the Alpha appeared at her elbow.

"Doctor Lecter!" She greets her father's old friend slash colleague with one of her bright and almost imperceptibly wry smiles. "How kind of you to join us, and good timing too. I was just referring Mr. Sheraton here to your paper on the evolutionary origins of social exclusion. It's still one of my favorites, and one of the reasons I've decided to pursue psychiatry."

"Isn't she something!" Mrs. Hamilton titters, while Sheraton simply nods in that old wizened and listless way of his. Everyone else agrees heartily. None of them need introducing to Dr. Lecter, they all know precisely who he is. Anyone worth their salt in Baltimore knows who Dr. Lecter is.

"Absolutely," Hannibal agrees. "Have you selected a school yet?"

"I was thinking John-Hopkins. I had a few offers across the board but I think I'd rather stay close to home, you know?"

"A fine choice."

Finally Hannibal turns his attention to the others patiently awaiting acknowledgment and pleasantries are exchanged. Rings are kissed and hands are shaken and Hannibal seamlessly fits himself into Alana's modest circle. Idle small talk follows, and Hannibal proves to be an enigmatic but pleasant conversational partner. Maintaining the illusion of gentility is, of course, one of his strong suits.

At some point in the conversation, Hannibal notices that Alana has trailed off and stopped speaking, gazing intently at something just past his shoulder. For the moment no one else is any the wiser, their conversations resuming in earnest. Ever curious, he follows her gaze to a young man in the distance, visible only through a small parting in the crowd. He is standing off to the side, underneath the shade of a great marble archway, as though excluding himself from the night's revelries.

He is speaking with an older, matronly woman wearing a ridiculous feather hat. Though he is a fair distance away, Hannibal can see him quite clearly -- as a thoroughbred Alpha, all of his senses are considerably sharper than most -- and it appears as though the conversation is quite heated. At least, the woman appears agitated. The young man's face remains neutral and unimpressed throughout the conversation. Suddenly the woman raises her hand and tosses a glass full of water directly at the boy's face before storming off in an angry huff. The lad only seems mildly put off by this, frowning intensely and pulling out a handkerchief to gingerly

wipe his face with. He promptly ducks out after that, turning a corner in search of a restroom no doubt.

So this is the omega he'd been hearing about, the singular male debutante present this year. He was as pretty as they said, surely, but his manners appeared to be rather...remiss. He wondered vaguely about who's good graces the lad must have been in to secure such a prestigious invitation.

By that point the others in their party have caught on and bore witness to the debacle. Most snort derisively while Mrs. Hamilton sighs loudly, bringing up an elegant folding fan to cover her face and twitter some more.

"What a shame. Such a pretty face, but I've heard nothing but awful things about his manner so far. Uncultured, that one. Must be the offspring of one of those vulgar, nouveau-riche types. They'll be the death of me, I swear! I've never even *heard* of the Grahams." Most quietly agree with her, and a few more rude remarks follow suit. Hannibal ignores the turn of conversation and addresses Alana instead.

"A friend of yours?" He remarks casually, finding the almost theatrical scene amusing but otherwise unremarkable.

"Sort of," Alana bites her lip in consternation. She considers going after him, but there is a sudden swell of music and an announcement that the first dance is about to begin: the traditional waltz. The soothing recorded music that has been playing starts to trail off as an orchestral ensemble takes its place on a raised dais at the forefront of the room. The crowd begins to part, making way for the dance floor to re-orient itself into some semblance of organization. The lights dim slightly, atmospherically, and people begin to take their proper places.

"May I have the first dance?" Hannibal offers gently, extending his hand in such a way that it was not untoward, but supplicating. While she seems unsure at first (thinking about the welfare of the boy from earlier, most like) she is quick to realize there is little else she can do without making waves. The smile she gives Hannibal is small and fond, knowing that her old friend offers himself in good will only. The omega is one of the few who understands that the good doctor will not try to court her and takes the offered hand graciously. It's hard not to notice the girls that nearly turn green with envy at the sight of her accepting a dance from a man so desperately sought after, but she does a valiant job of trying. They make their way to the dance floor hand in hand, and Hannibal promptly forgets about the pretty omega with the dark, dripping wet tresses.

Chapter End Notes

It's a little slow-going, I know, but I promise some Will/Hannibal interactions next chapter, hehe. Let me know what you think of the characterizations and pace so far, I take every comment and bit of advice to heart!

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!